

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 07183 031131Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----031135Z 107910 /13
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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3366
WHITE HOUSE IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 07183

EXDIS

WHITE HOUSE FOR APPOINTMENTS SECRETARY AND ADVANCE OFFICE
STATE FOR A

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (CARTER, JIMMY), UK
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S TRIP TO EUROPE -- DAVID OWEN

REF: SHUMATE/SPIERETTELCON MAY 2

1. IN RSNPONSE TO REQUEST REFTTELCON FOR ASSESSMENT OF
HOW FOREIGN SECRETARY DAVID OWEN IS REGARDED BY HIS
CABINET COLLEAGUES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO SOUTHERN
AFRICAN ISSUES, HERE ARE EMBASSY'S COMMENTS:
2. OWEN ENJOYS THE PATRONAGE OF THE TWO MOST POWERFUL
INDIVIDUALS IN THE CABINET, JIM CALLAGHAN AND DENIS
HEALEY. ALTHOUGH HIS METEORIC RISE TO THE FOREIGN
SECRETARYSHIP NATURALLY AROUSED THE ENVY OF SOME OF HIS
YOUNGER CABINET COLLEAGUES, THERE IS NONE WHO DOES NOT
ACKNOWLEDGE HIS QUICK AND LIVELY INTELLIGENCE OR HIS
VIGOR OR HIS BOLDNESS. HE IS A REFRESHING YOUNG FACE IN
A LINE-UP THAT WAS BEGINNING TO LOOK TIRED, AND FEW
LABORITES CAN FAIL TO APPRECIATE OWEN'S ELECTORAL VALUE
TO THE GOVERNMENT.

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3. THE PRIME MINISTER HAS COMPLETE CONFIDENCE IN OWEN.
HE WAS DELIGHTED WITH THE MANNER IN WHICH OWEN CARRIED
OFF THE TRIP TO AFRICA AND SAW IN IT A VINDICATION OF
HIS JUDGMENT IN CALVPULING OWEN TO HIS PRESENT POSITION.
NONETHELESS, WHERE SOUTHERN AFRICAN ISSUES ARE CONCERNED,
THE CABINET STILL KEEPS OWEN ON A RELATIVELY SHORT LEASH.
COLLECTIVELY THE CABINET IS MORE CAUTIOUS THAN OWEN,

MORE RELUCTANT TO GET OUT IN FRONT, SUSPICIOUS THAT THE US MIGHT LEAVE THE UK TO CARRY THE CAN. THEREFORE, AS THE SCENARIO UNFOLDS, OWEN MUST TOUCH BASE WITH THE CABINET ON EACH MAJOR NEW DEVELOPMENT. WITH PARTICULAR REGARD TO THE ZIMBABWE DEVELOPMENT FUND, OWEN IS KEEN TO INCREASE IT WHILE HEALEY, AS CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER, HAS MISGIVINGS ABOUT HOW MUCH IT MAY COST BRITAIN.

4. THE PROFESSIONALS AT THE FCO HAVE MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT OWEN, AS DOES HE ABOUT THEM. INTELLIGENT, IMAGINATIVE, ENERGETIC, YES, BUT ALSO MERCURIAL AND UNPREDICTABLE. HE IN TURN ENJOYS SHAKING UP THE BUREAUCRACY AND MAKES NO EFFORT TO HIDE HIS CONTEMPT FOR ITS CONSERVATIVE APPROACH TO ISSUES. ON SOUTHERN AFRICA, THE MANDARINS GIVE OWEN FULL MARKS FOR SKILLFUL HANDLING OF A COMPLEX PROBLEM AFTER ONLY RELATIVELY SHORT TUTORING, BUT HAVING BEEN THIS WAY BEFORE THEY FEAR HIS PRIDE MAY BE HEADING FOR A FALL.

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